

Why Every Educator Should Go on an Accreditation Visit!

We educators sometimes think we have learned all that we need to know. We teach, we direct, we lead, we assess, we assign, and many of us have completed doctoral programs, so we certainly have little more to learn!

I suggest, however, that professional development is a most important aspect of effective teaching and leadership for every educator. We have all secured professional development resources over the years and attended various conferences. These often consist of networking, coffee, meals, more coffee, a few seminars here and there, and then obligatory attendance at the main sessions. It is an especially difficult conference when you are in the vicinity of something entertaining, say Disney World. During the conference, the choices become stark: “Curricular Strategies” vs. Space Mountain, or “Assessment Techniques” vs. Epcot Center. I won’t even begin to consider what happens at conferences in New Orleans or Las Vegas!

I challenge every educator on the planet to make a point of going on at least one regional accreditation visit as a professional development activity. I readily admit that you will not have time for riding roller coasters or eating in vintage seafood restaurants on the coast, but you will learn more in one accreditation visit than you will in ten educational conferences.

Why is serving on an accreditation team to another school so valuable? Visits consist of three to four intense days of pure education. They afford you the chance to collaborate with other professional educators with different backgrounds who come from a variety of schools. You will visit a school together and evaluate curriculum, analyze learning data, review strategic planning, observe classrooms, and interview parents, students, and teachers. You will completely immerse yourself in the educational program of the school and compare it to national standards of excellence.

This intense time of collaboration will stretch you as an educator and open your eyes to new ideas and new ways of thinking about learning. If your team visits a charter school, private school, online school, or homeschool, you will see different styles of learning and ways of operating a school, some more successful than others. You will walk away from the accreditation visit wiser and more experienced as an educator. You will also walk away with new friends that may last a lifetime.

This professional growth activity will not cost you anything, except three or four days away from work. Most superintendents and administrators understand the value of accreditation and will support your absence from school for this kind of professional development. The regional accrediting agency will handle all the expenses, including your travel, lodging, and food. And, if you do this enough, you may be invited to travel overseas to accredit an English-speaking international school. Regional accrediting agencies in the United States accredit schools all over the world. I dare you to go to China just once on an accreditation visit, and then come back without telling everyone that it was a life-changing experience.

So here is the challenge: continue your coffee tours to various cities in the United States and enjoy the camaraderie found in educational conferences. Or, contact your regional accrediting agency and volunteer to go on an accreditation visit to another school. There are visits to schools on the K-12 level, to junior colleges, and to senior colleges and universities. The accrediting agency will train you, put you under the leadership of an experienced chairperson, and provide you with all the materials you need.

Almost 20 years ago, I accepted this challenge and went on one accreditation visit. I was hooked and have gone on a least one visit every year since then. I come home physically tired after every visit, but I am intellectually refreshed as an educator, invigorated as a leader, and more eagerly ready to return to my own school and make a difference in the lives of those I teach or lead. So I challenge every educator: go on one accreditation visit. I dare you to try it!

Lee Duncan, Ed.D.
Executive Vice-President
The Master’s College, Santa Clarita, CA

